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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Monday, May 18, 1942

Subject: Cotton Supplies in Wartime. Information from marketing specialists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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It's spring time -- time to wear cotton. Let's take a few minutes to see just where we civilians stand as far as cotton is concerned.

First of all, let's look around the house. Practically everywhere you see cotton fabrics. You and your daughter have a wardrobe full of cotton dresses. The men depend a lot on cotton, too, for shirts, trousers, caps and jackets. And if you "take stock" of the children's play clothes, I'm willing to bet that practically all of them are made of cotton.

Now, glance around the room -- curtains, slip covers, upholstery, towels in the kitchen.....well, the list is almost endless. And when you stop to think of all the families, like yours, in the United States -- well, you get an idea of how much we Americans depend upon cotton. In fact, I'll bet you have the idea that homemakers, as a group, are about the biggest customers the cotton industry has. Ordinarily, that's so. But right now you homemakers are getting a lot of competition from another very important customer -- a customer that's taking about all the fabrics our cotton textile industry can produce over and above our most essential civilian needs. Who's that customer?.....I think you can guess. Our Government, purchasing clothing and equipment for our military forces. Our cotton textile industry has done a good job supplying the government too. In fact, the textile industry makes the boast that our army is wearing the best uniforms any army ever wore.

What does the army need cotton for? Let's think that one over a little. Now, first of all, during the last few years the size of our army and navy has

doubled, tripled, and quardupled. And the need for fabric is much greater than it was a few years ago.

And, of course, that means that the cotton industry is working extra hard to produce all the cotton fabric needed by the fighting forces and for us here at home.

For instance, we have our window awnings. The army goes in for awning material in a big way. Only they use it for tents, tents of all kinds -- pup tents, barrack tents, hospital tents, and theater tents. But besides using canvas for tents, the Army and Navy use it for basins, buckets, haversacks, and for covering all kinds of equipment. In fact, the army is able to float small army trucks, and "jeep" cars across streams by simply wrapping the truck up in a big canvas tarpaulin and towing it across the stream. And besides that, the army uses canvas to cover the windshields and head lamps of trucks -- simply to prevent the glass from shining and revealing the truck's location at night.

In your home you may have three or four beds which require altogether twelve or sixteen sheets. The army has a terrific number of sheets. You see, the army boys sleep on sheets, and very good quality sheets too.

Summer suits. You undoubtedly have a good supply. Our military forces go in heavy for summer suits too. Yours may be bright colored, but the army goes for the plain, inconspicuous cotton uniforms. Many of our forces must be dressed for service in the tropics, and light cotton uniforms are the answer.

Maybe you think cotton summer dresses have no place in the Army. Well, here's a surprise. The Army does have uniform summer dresses. Nurses are commissioned as officers. And so, dresses are a part of the Army and Navy uniform equipment.

Cotton gets military duty in the colder climates too. Ski troops wear white cotton suits for two purposes -- wind protection and as a means of hiding in the snow. The "ski suits" are made of very tightly woven material. They keep out the wind. And with a woolen lining they are exceedingly warm to wear. The white suits,

together with attached white hoods, blend the ski trooper with the white snow background. So the enemy can't see them.

Lots of cotton goes into the raincoats for soldiers and sailors, just as it does for your own rainy day outfits.

And just like many of the mattresses in our homes, army mattresses are made of cotton. So are the pillows. So whether our forces are asleep or awake, our cotton growers, cotton spinners and the whole cotton industry are producing comfort and protection for our armed forces.

And, of course, the Army and Navy have many uses for cotton that most of us never dream of. For example, powder is usually fed to our big naval and coastal guns in silk bags. Silk makes an ideal powder bag because it burns fast and doesn't leave an ash. I hardly need to remind you of where we have been getting our silk. Since the war we've had to conserve our supply of silk for powder bags. And that's where cotton lends a helping hand. Scientists have perfected a chemically treated cotton fabric that burns fast, and leaves very little ash. It works fine as powder bags in the smaller caliber coast defense and navy guns.

Adding this all up, we see that providing enough cotton fabric for our armed forces and for us civilians, too, is a job. It's up to us to help. Of course, that means we must buy carefully the cotton clothes and household items that we need. And it means taking care of the fabrics we have -- careful laundering and prompt mending.

No matter what the cost, the army and navy must have enough cotton for their needs. Civilians will have enough, too, if they take reasonable care of cotton.

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